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U.S. House of Representatives

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June 22, 2006

Honorable J. Dennis Hastert
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Honorable John A. Boehner
Majority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Honorable Bill Thomas
Chairman
Committee on Ways and Means
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Speaker, Mr. Majority Leader and Mr. Chairman:

I am writing to urge that we move forward on a most urgent basis to pass in the House of Representatives the Haitian Hemispheric Opportunity Partnership Encouragement (HOPE) Act. This legislation is in the national security interests of the United States, the economic interests of the United States, the economic interests of the people and government of Haiti, and is the moral thing to do. For all these reasons, the legislation enjoys broad bipartisan support.

With the recent inauguration of President Preval, Haiti stands at a critical crossroads. This is a key moment of opportunity for both the United States and Haiti. To capitalize on this moment, Haiti needs to be able to create sustained economic opportunity for its citizens. One important component will be the jobs and investment opportunities created by the HOPE Act.

On February 2, 2005, at the Organizational Meeting of the Ways and Means Committee, I sought and received explicit assurance from Chairman

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Thomas that the HOPE legislation would be at "the top of the list" for Committee and Floor action at that time (more than 16 months ago). At that meeting, I raised the urgency of passing swiftly the legislation, which the Democratic Caucus had cleared for Unanimous Consent treatment on the Floor of the House on October 8, 2004. The Chairman responded that he would join me in making sure it's at the top of the list. Wanting to be certain that we were talking about Floor action, not hearings, I was gratified when the Chair added his comment that we needed action since we had already held hearings.

In recent days and weeks, there have been comments to the effect that trade legislation will be taken up on the House floor in the following order: Oman Free Trade Agreement (FTA), Peru FTA, then Vietnam Permanent Normal Trade Relations (PNTR). When asked for the reason for this order, the comment has been given that this is the order in which these agreements were negotiated.

I don't agree with "packaging" vital trade benefits for Haiti with these other bills as a matter of principle, and I don't know that I agree that the order of negotiation of an agreement should be used mechanically to determine Committee and Floor action. It would seem to me that each agreement should be taken up on its own merits and that several key factors should be considered.

However, the decision has been made to use the criterion of order of negotiation to sequence trade legislation, then the HOPE bill was crafted on October 7, 2004, long before any of the three bills that are reportedly being mentioned. Accordingly, for this reason, if for no other, the HOPE bill should be moved first.

I hope that we can work together to move forward without another day's delay on this legislation for people in such great and extraordinary need, and which serves important moral as well as economic and national security goals of our country.

Sincerely,

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Charlie". The signature is written over the printed name and title of the signatory.

Charles B. Rangel
Ranking Democrat